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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000343

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION REMAINS UNITED AHEAD OF CONGRESS

REF: A. MINSK 306

[¶](#)B. MINSK 262

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) At a meeting with EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Kramer, opposition leaders emphasized the importance of intense cooperation and successful strategy implementation going into and following the upcoming congress of democratic forces. After the congress, the coalition plans to increase its reach out to the Belarusian people and to widely publicize its alternative vision for the country. The leaders also discussed the effect of mass street actions on the regime and to what extent Russia should be involved in Belarus' transition to democracy. End summary.

Cooperation and Implementation are the Key Goals

[¶](#)2. (C) On April 25, EUR DAS David Kramer met with opposition leaders and their deputies. Following a discussion on the possibility of a meeting between DAS Kramer and Presidential Administration Deputy Head Natalia Petkevich (septel), de facto opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich confirmed the opposition's decision to hold seven regional conferences and one large congress of democratic forces (ref A). Belarusian Party of Communists Head Sergey Kalyakin and Milinkevich stressed, however, that the opposition's continued cooperation and implementation of the adopted strategies and not the upcoming congress are the key issues on which the opposition should focus.

[¶](#)3. (C) United Civic Party Chair Anatoliy Lebedko emphasized the importance of elaborating and publicizing the democratic forces' strategy to achieving democratic reform and their alternative ("small") constitution and economic reform plan. Lebedko encouraged his colleagues to make use of the 18 months before the 2008 parliamentary elections to spread widely the opposition's message to the Belarusian people. Belarus Popular Front Head Vintsuk Vyachorka described the need to reach out to all spheres of the Belarusian people, particularly given the possibility of a future economic crisis. He recommended explaining to voters the tenets of democracy and the prospects of receiving international aid from fellow democratic nations to alleviate the effects of economic malaise.

Peaceful Demonstrations Reveal Fears of the Regime

[¶](#)4. (C) According to Milinkevich, only massive peaceful street

actions will bring about the collapse of a dictatorial regime. While Milinkevich noted that the opposition is not yet strong enough to force the regime to dialogue, Vyachorka believed that the mass arrests and detentions in the lead up to the opposition's recent March 25 demonstration revealed the weaknesses and fears of the regime (reftel). The opposition believes that the April 26 Chernobyl March will be the next test of the opposition's potential and the regime's response.

Russia Should Not Lead Belarus to Democracy

¶ 15. (C) The leaders rejected the idea that Belarus can only become a democracy with Russia's help. Milinkevich stated that Russia can play a role in Belarus' transition to a democracy, but warned that Russia has its own goals, including increasing its regional influence, which do not coincide with Belarus' goals. Kalyakin agreed with Milinkevich's assessment, but stressed that the opposition should not discount Russia's influence on Belarus' political and economic future. He encouraged the opposition to take the lead in shepherding Belarus' democratic transition.

Comment

¶ 16. (C) The opposition's pledge to continue cooperation following the congress and implement their strategies and goals represents a significant change from the divided opposition of a month ago. It was also encouraging to observe their commitment to use peaceful demonstrations and aggressive public outreach to force the GOB into a dialogue. Such plans reaffirm the coalition's efforts to take on more responsibility for Belarus' transition to a democracy.

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Stewart